

Central Intelligence Agency



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**DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE**

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**Iran's Preparations for the Next Offensive** [redacted]

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**Summary**

Iran is preparing for a major winter offensive and will probably attack at one or more points along the southern front by February. These preparations include:

- improvements to the logistical support network along the southern front;
- the acquisition from foreign suppliers of a significant amount of military hardware and munitions;
- a major mobilization campaign to raise volunteers; and
- the redeployment of men and material to the southern front. [redacted]

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Although Iran may choose to launch a series of small offensives, Tehran will probably make one or two concentrated attacks at weak points in the Iraqi defenses. In its two major campaigns over the past two years, Al Basrah and Al Faw, Iran has used this strategy and achieved some success. This winter, the Iranians may be better able to exploit their successes because they now have the capability to bring increased firepower and mobility to bear against the Iraqi defenders. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Persian Gulf Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Questions and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division [redacted]

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### Iranian Intentions

Iran believes that the ground war is the key to defeating Iraq. Tehran also believes that a major victory on the ground will put enormous pressure on the Gulf states to reduce their support for Baghdad and is likely to cause a reevaluation by the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council of the strong US naval presence in the Persian Gulf. [redacted]

North of Al Basrah in the Hawizah marsh, the Iranian causeway network has been significantly expanded toward Iraqi lines. Engineers are nearing completion of an expansion project on the Majnoon Island they have controlled since 1984. When finished, the newly landfilled areas will double the size of the island and extend the island to within 5,500 meters of Iraqi positions on the west bank of the marsh. Additionally, expansion of the island will enable the Iranians to deploy more artillery to support operations. [redacted]

[redacted]  
Deputy Foreign Minister Larijani acknowledged in a recent press conference at the United Nations that Iran is undertaking an "unprecedented" military mobilization for an offensive against Iraq "when it is needed." [redacted]

To handle the increased supplies required for a major offensive, Iranian engineers have built new logistical facilities and supply dumps along the roads and the Rud e Karun river between Ahvaz and Khorramshahr, [redacted]

[redacted] These new facilities, as well as old ones, are steadily being filled with supplies and material transported by truck or river barges. Assault boat storage facilities in Ahvaz and near Khorramshahr continue to show increased activity, and assault boat landing piers have been rebuilt in the Khawr Abd Allah channel south of Al Faw, [redacted]

### Iranian Preparations

Iran is taking major steps to prepare for offensive operations this winter. These preparations include improvements to the logistical network built last year to support the attack on Al Basrah; the acquisition of a significant amount of armor, artillery, chemical weapons, and ammunition; the redeployment of artillery, armor, supplies, and small assault boats to depots behind the front; and increased recruiting, armor training, and basic infantry training throughout Iran since late summer. [redacted]

Iran has acquired a substantial amount of military hardware this year to replace losses and re-equip units. If Tehran effectively uses these weapons, Baghdad, for the first time in several years, will have to face an enemy with significantly more firepower and improved battlefield mobility. [redacted]

[redacted] continuing efforts by Iranian engineers to expand and repair the transportation network between the major supply centers of Ahvaz and Dezful and the front lines opposite Al Basrah and at Al Faw. (see map no. 1) These improvements, resumed after the summer, will facilitate the movement of men and material from interior Iran to the southern front. Additionally, [redacted]

We estimate that Iranian arms acquisitions this year include some 400 pieces of field artillery, at least 100 artillery gun barrels, 120 armored personnel carriers, and at least two million rounds of artillery and mortar ammunition. [redacted]

[redacted] Iran has repaired and refurbished a number of artillery pieces and approximately 150 main battle tanks, probably to re-equip units. [redacted]

[redacted]  
the front lines are being rebuilt. [redacted]

The key to Iranian success will be the effective use of this newly acquired firepower and mobility. Iran demonstrated last year during the [redacted]

25X1 fighting east of Al Basrah, that it could effectively employ armor. This year, the Revolutionary Guard has been training on captured and refurbished armor, [redacted]

addressing these rallies and reviewing the volunteers. Iranian claims that they have recruited 600,000 volunteers men are probably exaggerated; a more realistic number would be 125,000 to 175,000 volunteers. Still, these troops will improve Iran's ability to mount a large offensive comparable to the lengthy fighting at Al Basrah between January and March of 1987 or alternatively, a series of smaller attacks along the front. [redacted]

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25X1 Although outnumbered, Iranian artillery has been more effective in supporting ground operations than Iraqi artillery, suggesting that the Iranians will put their newly acquired artillery pieces to good use. At Al Faw and Al Basrah, Iranian artillery was especially effective against massed Iraqi armor and probably was responsible for the majority of the 800 armored vehicles Baghdad lost in those two campaigns. [redacted]

[redacted] basic infantry training has been underway in some 15 major training camps since early September, and we expect training activity to increase in the near future. [redacted]

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25X1 This equipment and material has been or is in the process of being moved from garrisons and depots inside Iran to logistical facilities behind the front lines. [redacted]

[redacted] area and have begun training, [redacted]

[redacted] Artillery has been shipped by rail from Tehran to Dezful and Ahvaz, and [redacted] areas, [redacted]

#### Iranian Options for an Attack

The Iranian manpower buildup reinforced with increased firepower and mobility, if utilized properly, dramatically increases Tehran's chances of achieving at least a limited victory. As it did at Al Basrah in 1987 and Al Faw in 1986, Iran is likely to try to gain as much Iraqi territory as possible by probing for Iraqi weaknesses, concentrating its forces at the point of attack, striving for at least tactical surprise, and reinforcing any success with more troops. [redacted]

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25X1 Iran also appears to be improving its capability to control multiple operations. Last winter, Tehran demonstrated that it could conduct and support simultaneous operations at several points along the front. Iran is also improving its command structure by building large command posts for each sector of the southern front, [redacted]

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25X1 Iran is also in the midst of a large mobilization; major recruitment rallies and associated demonstrations were held in over 25 cities in late November and early December. The senior Iranian leadership, including Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani, President Khamenei, and Prime Minister Musavi have been barnstorming around the country

In our estimation, the Iranians will attempt one or more of the following: a thrust across the Hawizah marsh, another direct assault on Al Basrah, an attack across the Shatt al Arab river south of Al Basrah, or a thrust out of the Al Faw peninsula towards the Iraqi port city of Umm Qasr. In all likelihood, the Revolutionary Guard will spearhead the offensive and be supported by Regular Army units and reinforced by massed volunteers. The Revolutionary Guard has assumed the major role in the ground war with Iraq, having conducted every major Iranian offensive since 1983. The regular Iranian Army has been relegated to providing fire support and logistical assistance, as well as conducting limited diversionary attacks on the central and northern fronts. [redacted]

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The Iranian option that Baghdad and the defending Iraqi VII Corps have been preparing for is an attack out of the Al Faw peninsula towards the city of Umm Qasr. The Iranian capture of Umm Qasr would be a severe strategic and psychological blow to Baghdad. The loss would expose to assault the southern side of Al Basrah and the key Iraqi logistical center of Az Zubayr. Additionally, the major Iraqi supply route from Kuwait would be severed and the remaining major route would be increasingly threatened. Moreover, the presence of Iranian troops on the Kuwaiti border would significantly increase the pressure on Kuwait to end its support for Iraq and terminate the reflagged tanker program. [redacted]

25X1 We believe the Iranians' best chance for success at Umm Qasr would be to advance westward from their positions on the peninsula, using infantry supported by APC's while simultaneously assaulting across the Shatt al Arab river to cut off Iraqi front line units. (see map no. 2) A night amphibious assault up the Khawr abd Allah channel, that bypassed forward Iraqi positions, would aid Iranian efforts substantially. [redacted]

25X1 In a less likely scenario, Tehran might choose to attack Umm Qasr by crossing the Kuwaiti islands of Bubiyan and Warbah. The Iranians could seize the islands, occupy parts of them, or simply pass through the territory to threaten Umm Qasr from this angle. An Iranian attack against these lightly defended islands would bring severe pressure to bear on all the Arab Gulf states to end their support for Baghdad, such a move however, would severely damage Tehran's relations with most Arab states, as well as its recently improved ties with France and the Soviet Union. [redacted]

25X1 Additional Iranian offensive options (see map no. 2) might include:

-- Continued assaults against Al Basrah which would pressure the city's defenses directly. Iran however would have to attack into the teeth of the Iraqi defenses.

-- An attack across the Shatt al Arab river near Abu al Khasib at the dividing line between the

Iraqi III Corps and VII Corps to support an assault on Al Basrah or out of Al Faw. Corridors between corps are notoriously vulnerable to attack, and the Iranians might achieve significant success with such a move.

-- An attack out of the Hawizah marsh toward Qalat Salih ori Al Qurnah designed to cut the vital road between Al Basrah and Al Amarah. The enlarged Majnoon Island and the improved causeway network would facilitate this option. [redacted]

### Iraqi Defensive Preparations

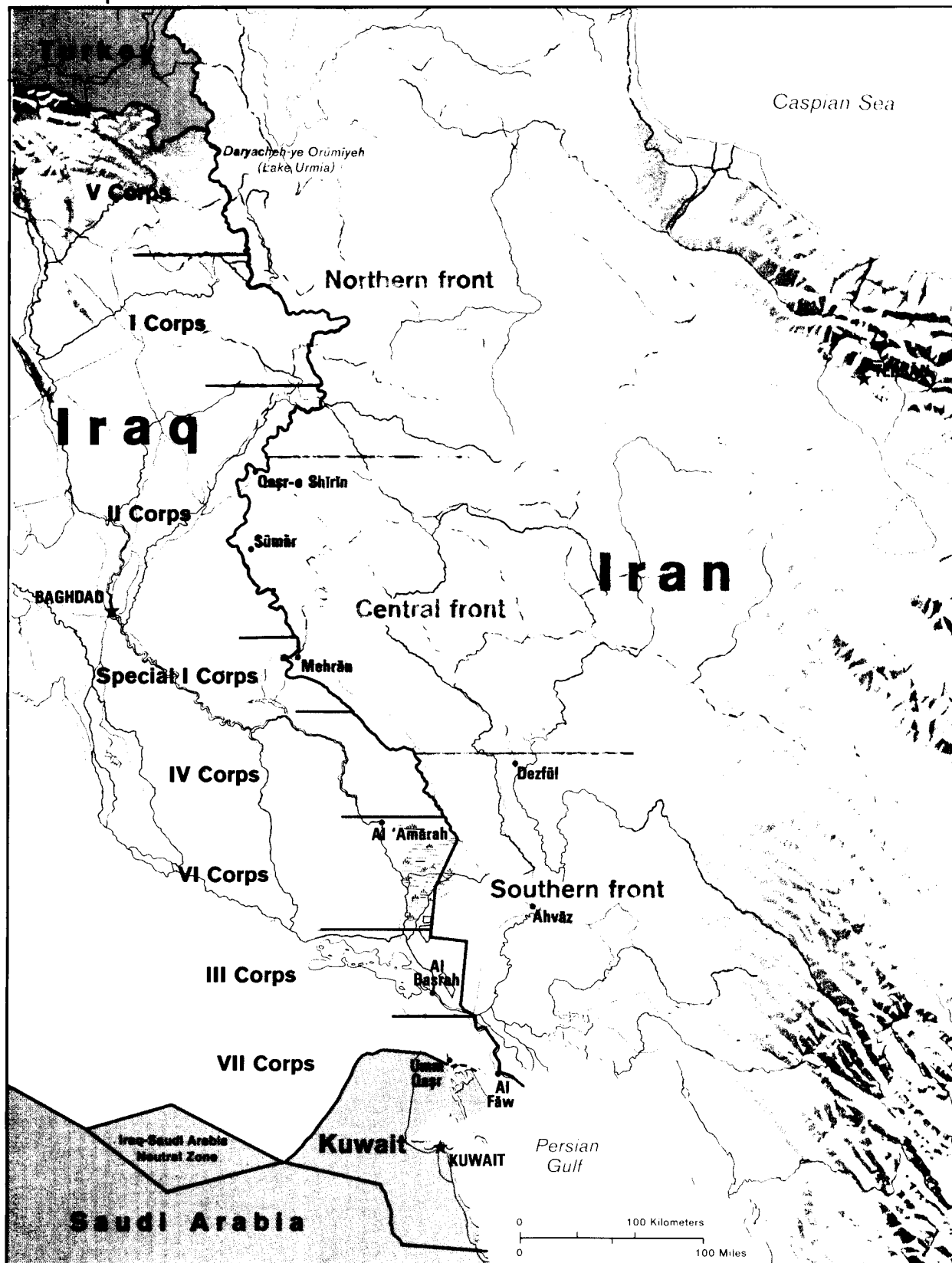
The Iraqi High Command is expecting an Iranian offensive against either the III Corps or VII Corps and has redeployed most of its reserves to reinforce those sectors. Baghdad has expanded the main reserve of the Iraqi army, the Republican Guard, again this year and has designated it as the principal reserve for the Al Basrah-Al Faw area. Baghdad also has redeployed half of the armored reserve of the Iraqi IV Corps, which defends in the Al Amarah area, to the VII Corps area [redacted]

[redacted] Iran could take advantage of this redeployment by attacking the IV Corps in hopes of breaking through its reduced defenses. [redacted]

### Outlook

Iran probably can use its newly acquired weaponry, increased mobility, and strong infantry skillfully enough to achieve at least a limited success, but Tehran will probably be unable to inflict a major defeat on the Iraqi Army. Iran has achieved occasional success in the ground war by showing that it can shove the Iraqis back despite the Iraqi Army's overwhelming superiority in firepower. Now that Iran is increasing its firepower, its chances for further success have improved. [redacted]

## Iran-Iraq Border



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